

segments were less effective than they are in more homogeneous societies; but this can hardly be proved. The fact remains that some segments did break off, that the state attempted to condition them, and that sometimes they were successful, probably sometimes not. The transition was sharp between the condition in which a segment was an integral loyal part of the state and that in which it was itself a new state. Specially a state was surrounded by a no-man's-land. Everything inside the unconditioned ring of country was in the state, everything outside it was not. Within the state there was no freedom such as sometimes characterizes societies whose political boundaries are not uniquely defined. In Nguni society, murder was punished by the state, and the cattle paid by the murderer's kin were handed over to the Paramount Chief, not to the kin of the murdered man. The Paramount Chief, it is true, usually handed on the cattle to them, but the method of settlement is indicative of the power of the state. There was only one national law, accompanied by summary punishment of death for those whose actions threatened its mythical effectiveness, as for example by singing the ceremonial songs at the wrong time. Furthermore, there was a single age-set system, in which the members of each set were drawn from all segments, and because of the activities of the sets, the segments united in aggression against the external world.

When a split threatened, the issue was decided by force of arms. Yet in a quite significant sense the cohesion of the state was not based on force at all. The Paramount Chief had no monopoly of force, for as we have seen there were representatives of every major segment in each age-set, and any head who could claim the loyal support of his segment had at his disposal a fighting force as efficient as that of anyone else. Within the army there was little or no technical, as distinct from tactical, specialization and the Paramount Chief had no bodyguard or other specially recruited force on which he could rely. The Nguni were contemptuous of guns, for the Tower muskets used by the Arabs and others could not penetrate their shields at normal firing range, and such guns as the Nguni possessed were used only for making a noise.⁶² There was no strong central power posed against the provincial lords, as in some societies. The strength of any segment was measured by its internal cohesion, its size and fighting ability, as matched against the cohesion, size and ability of the forces that could be marshalled against it. While he was loyal, expansion in a man's segment

⁶² Wiese, 'Epidemics', p. 477, and 'Geschichte', p. 196; Reid, 'Tradition', p. 461, 462; Young, *History*, p. 105.

organized by a commoner. All the animals killed belong to the chief and must be taken to him. He then usually rewards the men who killed and carried the animals with part of the meat. There is thus a difference from commoner hunts, on which the animals belong to those who kill and carry them and not to the man in charge of the hunt. Whereas on a commoner hunt some men usually lose interest and drop out during the chase, this is less likely to happen on a royal hunt. A commoner, even if he is a headman, cannot force his neighbours to come with him on a hunt, but occasionally if the field is very poor a chief will summon others to his court.

These royal hunts appear to be of social rather than economic significance. Big game is scarce in Nguniland, and a hunt attended by two hundred men may sometimes yield as few as half a dozen antelope. Nguni like to eat game meat, but they do not regard hunting as an activity in which game should be killed as effectively as possible. They learn the much more efficient methods employed by the Gwena, illegal though they are in the eyes of the Administration. An Nguni lad was once ordered by his village headman to attend me on a hunt in which we used nets in Gwena fashion. The lad was sulky throughout the hunt and made no effort to kill any animals. A few days later we went hunting again, this time employing Nguni techniques. We tramped many miles on a very hot day and killed nothing at all, and yet he appeared to have thoroughly enjoyed himself. Royal hunts must be seen in this light. A chief can no longer command a regiment of soldiers but he can call out his men hunting.²² Men attend because they consider it their duty to do so and because they are aware of the sanctions at the chief's disposal.

Royal hunts are sometimes of practical importance, when there are lions to be hunted. Lions appear in Nguniland sporadically, apparently on passages between the game reserve on the Nyanaland side of the border and the sparsely inhabited Luangwa Valley. Hunters like to be in strength when tackling lions, and the men of a county look to their chief to call a royal hunt to deal with them. Chiefs are relatively well supplied with guns, and the combination of many hunters armed with spears and a few guns gives confidence.

6. African bureaucracies

Prior to the recognition of Native Courts in 1939 there was little specialization in the functions of the various indigenous leaders supported by the Administration. All of them, chief, sub-

²² See my 'Fort Jameson Nguni', p. 215, for Nguni hunting methods.

THE NGONI POLITICAL SYSTEM

726 The *indabai* was made from the roots of a creeper and a bush which
 787 grew on the banks of rivers. These roots were burned over the fire,
 [724] pounded and mixed with water. The warriors were given some to lick
 on the tips of their fingers, some was smeared inside their shields, and
 the rest was beaten in a gourd till it foamed. The 'war doctor' took the
 tail of a goat or of a snake and dipped it in the foam and sprinkled the
 warriors as they finally passed out of the gateway of the kraal on the
 campaign. This medicine was for strengthening them and also for
 making them 'dippery', so that the enemy spears would glide by them
 and not pierce them, and they could slip between the points of the enemy
 muskade. After being sprinkled with the *indabai* no one could sleep with
 his wife or any other woman, as he would risk squalling the effect of the
 medicine and therefore would be more liable to be killed.

[P-7] The *ididamas* was a spear with a barbed hook. The Paramount there
 [411] is in front of the army as they stand in the kraal until all the warriors had
 left. It was then put back in the *ididamas* where it was kept in the care
 of the owner of that hut.

There were thus three functions to be performed, each by one of the
 war medicines. The *indabai* was to strengthen and protect individual
 warriors. The *ididamas* was the symbol of their Paramount and their
 kingdom leading them to war and weakening the enemy. The *ididamas*
 was the symbol of invincibility, administered by the Paramount.

726 There were two stages of assembling in the Paramount's village before
 a campaign. The first followed the initial summons to mobilize, when
 the local companies (*mbandila*) marched into the kraal, sorted
 themselves into age regiments (*mbute*) and sang their regimental songs.
 Then followed the *igaba*, the war-dance, when the warriors wore their
 full war-dress, and the women joined in. There was no individual
 dancing but a working up of corporate feeling through the dancing and
 songs. The Ngoni used no drums in their music, relying on achieving
 [533] rhythm and union by the stamping of their feet and their singing. After
 this dance the warriors left for their villages, while at the Paramount's
 village preparation was made for food and stuff for the campaign. Hard

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 251 cakes of roasted bullrush millet, kaffir-corn and groundnuts pounded
 together, and dried meat, were the main supplies carried. At the second
 summons the warriors returned in their companies with their carriers.
 These carriers, who were usually young boys, carried the war-dresses
 and ornaments wrapped in a mat, and the food supplies.

Since on this final meeting depended much of the ultimate success of
 the campaign, only the warriors and the senior men were present, and
 all women and young children were excluded from the kraal. After the
 objectives of the fighting had been explained the warriors were addressed
 by the old men and exhorted to be brave and to help their comrades, and
 then the final medication by the 'war doctor' took place. The separation
 of the army from the civil population was complete until their return

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960

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1. Chief dressed for war-dance

[facing page 16]
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3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960

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[41]



2. Chief dressed for war-dance with wives



3. Chief and his elders in kraal

[facing page 17]

VILLAGE LIFE FOR OLDER BROTHERS AND SISTERS

All of them made their own axes, knobkerries and catapults for hunting. Some were interested in music and made shepherds' pipes, or one-stringed lyres, or hand pianos of metal strips affixed to a wooden base. They composed their own songs and airs for these instruments. Others showed ingenuity in making elaborate models of lorries and aeroplanes, or in carving heads of animals. Others liked to weave fibre into the wide-brimmed hats some herd-boys wore.

More significant still for their future social relationships, they began now to choose their own intimate friend and to form the friendship pacts which were characteristic of Ngoni society, and regarded by adults as important in the child's development. In the friendship pacts, especially those between boys, there was no implied or manifest restraint. They could have 'joking relations', and hence say outrageous things to each other. They could quarrel and make it up, and defy each other's wishes and decisions, without a final breach. The relationship between friends often lasted into later adult life, and was probably all the stronger for the occasional lapses and outbursts, and by the fact that in the daily companionship of friends the burden of observing 'respect' did not oppress them.

The boys' dormitory

The hut known as the boys' dormitory and the whole system of living which it represented was a traditional feature of Ngoni village life. In their culture it had three main purposes. Formerly, when as they said 'War was our school', it was the place where boys slept and lived together, and where they learned to defend themselves and to obey authority. It was in a sense the preparatory school for the regiment, and the herding of cattle was the basis of the curriculum. Once a boy went to sleep in a dormitory he never left it until he married, unless he was seriously ill. In the days of warfare, he learned in the dormitory and out herding the cattle, a knowledge of the bush and its wild life and of his fellows, and

THE THRESHOLD OF ADULTHOOD (II)

the older herd-boys when they were discussing 'cattle problems' in the evening. They took them into the kraal and showed them signs of the cattle not being well from the condition of the skin, udders, hoofs and mouth. The older boys were also called to be present if medicine was given to cattle, either some specific known to the owners, or treatment given by a 'specialist' called in, who might have real skill and knowledge about sick animals or be trying his luck with secret remedies known only to himself. The herd-boys were taught to notice the condition of other cattle than the ones of which they had charge, and to report on them. These might be cattle in other villages, or cattle belonging to their father's house 'boarded out' in another kraal according to Ngoni practice. The older herd-boys went with their father and his brothers to local markets where cattle were bought and sold, and listened to arguments about their condition which could make a difference of several pounds in the price they fetched. 868
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When it had been decided in the village to kill a beast, for eating, or for selling the meat, or for a sacrifice, it was usually a young adult who was called to spear the animal. Some young men became adept at planting the spear behind the left shoulder in such a way that the beast dropped dead at once. At times two or more stabs were necessary, but it was a matter of pride and no small skill to succeed the first time. The senior herd-boys, who had driven the animal out of the kraal after separating it from its fellows, stood close round and watched attentively, for the stab had to be both accurate and forceful. The reputation of being skilful at killing a beast, of being a 'one stab' man, was greatly desired by herd-boys. They coveted equally the reputation of being skilful at flaying the beast. With carefully sharpened knives, in a few quick deft strokes, the young men slit the skin, opened it up and began to cut up the carcass. Like assistants at a surgical operation, the senior herd-boys held the knives, lifted a limb, turned back the skin, collected the blood, removed the [443]
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CHILDREN OF THEIR FATHERS

476 having finished their task, and going off to wash in the river
342 with more whistling and singing.

Specialized crafts

- 463 Ngoni elders said that in old days there were no specialists in the villages, except the iron workers who were mostly captured people, and that all men knew how to work in leather, wood, and fibres. By the time schools had been established [177] and a variety of careers lay open to boys, it was rare to find ex-schoolboys taking up village crafts with a view to making a cash income from them. A few did, however, and their choice of a craft was attributed either to wishing to work with a relative, or to an inborn skill and liking for the craft.
- 281 Tanning skins was one such craft, scraping them, rubbing in ashes and stretching them on frames. Cutting shields from [411] skins and interlacing the front with different coloured skins was considered a highly skilled job. Making wooden spoons, 322 wooden meat dishes, headrests for pillows, hafts for spears and knives, and sheaths for knives, was carried on in most [413] Ngoni villages by two or three specialists using small sharp axes. They were assisted by a youth or two who liked the work, showed some aptitude for it and enjoyed sitting by the kraal gate, intent on their job, but missing nothing of what 285 was going on. In remote villages many men made mats and baskets for household use and for sale and paid their taxes from such sales. Every man knew how to make bark rope 283 for binding loads, fastening the grass on roofs, tying up beasts.
- 534 Musical instruments were another specialized craft, inseparable from being a musician and knowing how to perform on them. Small hand pianos of strips of metal on a wooden base, single stringed and several stringed lyres strung over a hollow gourd—these were solo instruments to accompany songs. A boy might all of a sudden decide to make such an instrument and learn how to play it by assiduous practice.

164 A. G. O. Hodgson.—*Achewa and Angoni of the Dowa District of the Nyasaland Protectorate.*

the *ngululu* or throwing spear, the shaft of which was made of *monko* or *masupani* or other hard wood. The head is bound to the shaft with copper wire; part of an ox tail serves as a grip; and at the top is a plume of goat's hair known as the *chowa*. Battle axes were also used. Round his waist the warrior wore a *niyogo*, or kilt composed of strips of skin of leopard, wild cat, monkey, baboon or sheep—some of them straight, and others plaited and twisted. In lieu of a *niyogo*, a sporran or *chitewe* *aka ku mate* might be worn in front with a similar covering styled *chitewe* *aka ku mbuyo* behind. These were generally made of serval or other wild cat skins. *Njiwiri* or garters, consisting of strips of goat skin threaded with iron bells also known as *njiwiri*, were worn below the knee; and *mitobu* or earrings of lead completed the fighting man's attire.

The Achewa also carried battle-axes, but they relied mainly on the bow (*wa*) and arrow (*mpuliro*). The favourite wood for the bow was *maduma*, and the bowstring or *uwingu* was made from the skin of Sharpe's steinbuck or another small antelope. The barbed head (*neketo*) of the arrow is bound to the *bano* (shaft of *bango* reed) by *bwazi* string cemented with the sap of the wild fig tree. The fork at the butt end is known as *uwera*, and is protected by a binding of *bwazi* string called *bwazi*, which is also the name for the hair of an elephant's tail. Chiefs displayed a battle headdress styled *nyoni*, consisting of the feathers of the turaco, coucal (vide supra VIII, 2) and other birds sewn on to a pad of goat skin. An *mbwa*, or band of cowrie shells, was frequently worn round the forehead.

Their favorite weapon

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TRADITION AND PRESTIGE AMONG THE NGONI

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serve their own culture, so that they were not submerged in the very different cultures round them? The Ngoni themselves give the answer to this first question, saying, 'We fought with spears and shields; those others had only bows and arrows and sometimes guns.'¹ The making of these shields, which formerly gave courage and protection to the warriors, is to this day almost a ritual. To watch a chief working at one on the threshold of his hut, or a village headman and his friends cutting and shaping one in the kraal, is to realize the value put on them by the Ngoni. They refuse to make them for sale as curiosities, and several Europeans have told me that they have tried in vain to get one.

Having conquered by the shield and spear, the Ngoni maintained their prestige by their highly developed political organization. All around them were small chieftains owning a few villages with no integration in any large political unit.² The Ngoni state was focussed in the *inkosi*, the Paramount Chief, who was at once the 'owner' of the land, the 'head' of the state, and the 'father' of his people. The Ngoni, as we have seen, are always ready to indicate those institutions and related traditions which mark them off from the surrounding tribes, and which give their state a cultural reality of its own. They point first to their language and their traditions of Dingiswayo, Zwidi, and Chaka as proving their southern origin. Other neighbouring peoples have vague traditions of wandering from north to south, or west to east, but the Ngoni know exactly where they came from and by what route. Their language is almost identical with old Zulu. I was told by many Europeans that it hardly existed any longer, and I was therefore surprised to find to what an extent it is still spoken and used. Most of the true Ngoni to-day are bilingual⁴; with the exception of a few very old Ngoni people, everyone to-day speaks one of the local vernaculars, Nsenga, Tumbuka, or Chewa.⁵ Ngoni is the language of the aristocrats, and a large proportion of the true

¹ The kind of antique guns traded to the Chewa by the Portuguese and Arabs were no match for the Ngoni skill with the long throwing-spear or the short stabbing-assegai, and the bullets were such that the stout cow-hide shields of the Ngoni could withstand them. Hence the consternation of the Ngoni when the machine-gun bullets of the British troops pierced their shields in the Ngoni 'war'.

² With the possible exception of Chikuramayembe, Chief of the Henga.

³ Translations of vernacular terms.

⁴ Or trilingual if they know English too.

⁵ The same as Nyanja.

10: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949) 1959

FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

THE STATE

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The councillors and assessors are nominated by the chiefs on the advice of their lieutenants and some of them are in fact lieutenants or their sons. The court clerk acts as secretary to his chief if he is illiterate, and he assists the chief in his contacts with the Administration. These clerks are also sometimes sons of lieutenants or brothers of chiefs. One of the tasks of the court clerk is to issue licences of all kinds, for guns, beer selling, bicycles, dogs, and so on. This brings him into contact with many people and he does a certain amount of touring looking for unlicensed dogs and bicycles. Owing to this interest in licences and the running of the court, he is the person who takes the initiative in the few public prosecutions that are brought. Civil actions are initiated by paying sixpence for a summons, which is usually issued by the court clerk. He is thus well informed of quarrels in advance before they come up for hearing in the court. He is well known throughout the county and exercises a great deal of influence.

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Chiefs and People

Whenever beer was brewed in a village, there was an obligation to carry one pot to the chief, and this obligation persists. Apart from this, however, there does not seem ever to have been any organized system of sending tribute to the chief. Mpezeni is said to have had a monopoly of all prisoners of war, but those who had taken the captives were frequently allowed to keep them themselves. This is mentioned as a specific privilege of regional governors. Nowadays the chiefs expect hospitality when they enter the villages, but they have little call on the services of their people. The little assistance they get locally is probably less valuable than the presents they are given by men who are away working or who have just returned. When the chiefs visit the mining towns they are offered money and clothes by Ngoni working there.

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The chiefs own a number of guns and lend these to people they can trust. All the chiefs organize their own hunts, which differ from the hunts of ordinary people in that all the animals killed belong to the chief, who should, however, give a leg to the killer of each animal. Attendance is compulsory for adult men in the villages that are called out on the hunt, although in practice there are always many absentees. These royal hunts do not usually involve a whole county, but only part of the county. They are useful in keeping down the number of predatory animals, and damage done to crops by wild pigs and baboons is sometimes attributed to the failure of the chief to organize enough hunts.

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352 Beds are owned in general by the younger generation only, and then at the rate of one per household. Otherwise, everyone sleeps on the floor on a reed mat. During the day, the mat is rolled up except when needed for drying flour in the sun. These mats are made from reeds that grow near streams. The reeds are split in four, and are threaded with a thin rope made from the inner bark of the nzizi tree. Wooden headrests are now a rarity, and if any headrests at all is used, it is a European pillow. Blankets, quilts and, less frequently, sheets, are bought from stores.

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412 The chief tool for use in the garden is the hoe. Ruins of furnaces for smelting iron ore are still to be seen, but are not now used, and are said to have been worked in the old days only by Chewa slaves. Hoe blades are bought in the stores, and hafted with a handle made in the village. Handle making is a man's job, but one that every man knows how to do. Axes are made from blades bought in the store, or else from a worn down hoe blade, with a home-made handle. Adzes are used for mortar making, and young boys make miniature adzes as toys. A pointed blade hafted on to the end of a straight handle is used for making holes in the ground when building.

493 Sledges and, less commonly, unarticulated carts with solid wheels are made for transporting the harvest from the fields to the village, and for collecting firewood. These are pulled by cattle, not always oxen, using simple yokes made of wood and sinew, with a wooden drawbar.

224 Hunting is carried on in the dry season, particularly towards the end, when the grass burns easily. Guns of varying degrees of antiquity are used, but none of these are made by Ngoni, although the Chewa still make guns. On a hunt, the rank and file are armed with throwing spears and knobkerries. The gun carriers walk about two hundred yards in front of the main body, who are spread on a single line at right angles to the line of advance. The leader of